



Designing for care: employing ethnographic design methods at special care homes for young offenders – a pilot study

Franz James & Sepideh Olausson

To cite this article: Franz James & Sepideh Olausson (2018): Designing for care: employing ethnographic design methods at special care homes for young offenders – a pilot study, Design for Health, DOI: [10.1080/24735132.2018.1456783](https://doi.org/10.1080/24735132.2018.1456783)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24735132.2018.1456783>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 09 Apr 2018.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 159



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

VISUAL ESSAY



Designing for care: employing ethnographic design methods at special care homes for young offenders – a pilot study

Franz James ^a and Sepideh Olausson ^b

^aHDK –Academy of Design and Crafts, Department of Design, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden; ^bSahlgrenska Academy, Institute of Health and Care Sciences, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This visual essay describes a pilot study aimed at evaluating the methods 'Sketch and Talk' and photo-voice in researching the impact of the physical environment in special residential homes in Sweden. The homes provide compulsory care for young persons with psychosocial problems, criminality or drug abuse. The field of research on the physical environment's impact focuses mainly on security and risk factors; little is known about the lived experience of young incarcerated persons. Visual and written data was collected at a home for young men (16–21), and analysed through a phenomenological approach outlined by van Manen and Ahmed. In this article, we present Lived Space as a main theme with three sub-themes that emerged from critical reading of the young men's narratives: Being elsewhere; Being punished and Being disempowered. The methods proved to be suitable, however, due to challenges related to the context and the young men's specific life situations, modifications were necessary.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 March 2018
Accepted 21 March 2018

KEYWORDS

Design and health; sketch and talk; photo-voice; ethnographic methods; qualitative methods

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe a pilot study conducted at a special residential home for children/adolescents with psychosocial problems, substance abuse and/or criminal behaviour. These homes are run by the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care (SiS), providing individual compulsory care. The goal of the pilot study is to investigate what methodologies and methods are suitable to gain a better understanding of the physical environment's impact on children/adolescents' well-being and rehabilitation. This pilot is a part of a research project at the University of Gothenburg which aims to understand the children/adolescents' experiences of the physical environment.

CONTACT Franz James  franz.james@hdk.gu.se

The field of research concerning the impact of the physical environment in these settings is sparsely explored and where research does exist, this focuses mainly on security, risk factors and individual outcomes of care interventions. Little is known about the physical environment's role in rehabilitation and preparation for a life without norm-breaking behaviour although there is good evidence in other areas to show that what is seen, felt and experienced affects levels of stress and impacts the ability to heal (Ulrich 1984, 1991; Ulrich et al. 2004). These studies emphasize, among many things, the importance of access to nature, single-bed rooms and autonomy. But how it is to experience the physical environment as a young incarcerated person, is a question that rarely is asked.

The objective in this article is to evaluate the choice of methods for data collection. We also present a few preliminary findings.

Materials and methods

The theoretical standpoint in this article is a phenomenological perspective where we investigate the meanings of the physical environment through the children/adolescents' lived experiences. Phenomenological investigations aim at explicating the meanings as people live them in their everyday life, lifeworld, and recognize time, body and space as an intertwined whole. Lifeworld is the taken for granted everyday life which is in constant motion where new experiences reveal themselves as they are lived through (Van Manen 1990).

Given the specific situation of being incarcerated and cared for in a 'total institution' (Goffman 1961) requires a research methodology that has the potential to go to 'the things themselves', as Husserl (2001) phrases it. In the case of this paper, we are specifically interested in how the physical environment presents itself to the children/adolescents and the implications for designing therapeutic/healing environments, hence the qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach.

By employing a phenomenological approach to the children/adolescents' experiences through ethnographic methods, 'Sketch and Talk' and photo-voice, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and how these narratives can contribute to future design of special residential homes. As Plunkett, Leipert, and Ray (2013) phrase it: 'One way to promote a higher degree of authenticity for phenomenological data is to create opportunities for study participants to provide data that is most meaningful to them'.

Research has proven that it is easier for children/adolescents to verbalize their feelings, thoughts and experiences with the aid of images (Strack, Magill, and Mcdonagh 2004). 'Sketch and Talk' and photo-voice allow for critical discussion/interplay between the children/adolescents and the researcher about the physical environment. This facilitates forwarding of their messages to an audience with the power to make a difference. The vulnerability of this group puts an ethical demand

on the researcher to hear the voices of people ‘who are silenced’ (Liamputtong 2007). Visual methods may also mitigate the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (Allen 2012; Heidelberger and Smith 2016).

‘Sketch and Talk’ is a method where the researcher uses the technique of sketching (and noting) with its own qualities to facilitate specific documentation and raises the level of consciousness (Cross 2007). It allows a thorough shared exposition of private space and to zoom in on activities, situations or other phenomena that reveal themselves to be essential in the interview. The sketching could be understood as a radar that searches for hidden essentials and contributes to an understanding of objects and their meaning. Sketching offers a selective focus on specific objects or phenomena and can exclude surrounding visual clutter (Harper 2012), which also, for good and bad, brings the critical issue of the researcher’s subjectivity in choosing the motive and style of sketching. Nevertheless, the world that is portrayed through photos or drawn is its own, and connects to ‘different realities’ (Harper 2012) than what is represented through conventional research methods.

Photo-voice is a method that involves inserting photographs into the research interview. The strength of the method is that it offers the participant ownership of the captured image and brings important democratic and critical issues in play (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001). Data generated through photo-voice has a two-fold character; photographs provide visual information with or without interpretation, at same time they represent a subjective perspective and mediate social and technical constructions. On one hand photos offer a possibility to go to what is seen through the eyes of the people themselves, and on the other hand photographs may be considered as a bridge between subjectivity and objectivity as they capture something real, gather visual information and frame the reality as they elicit subjective perspective of the people (Hansen–Ketchum and Myrick 2008).

Data collection

Setting and participants

Data has been collected at a home for male adolescents 16–21 years of age who are under compulsory care. The home, a former prison, is situated in a rural area accommodating 16 young men living in two different wards (Figure 1). The buildings, two-storey houses, were built in late 1970s. The home also includes a school, gym facility, workshop and music studio, located in separate buildings. The whole complex is hedged with chain link fencing and barbed wire (Figure 2). The surroundings consist of wild nature with bird life and animals, fields, lakes and rivers.

Data collection procedure

The head at each ward had informed the young people and staff about the study prior to the researchers’ arrival. The young men were given information

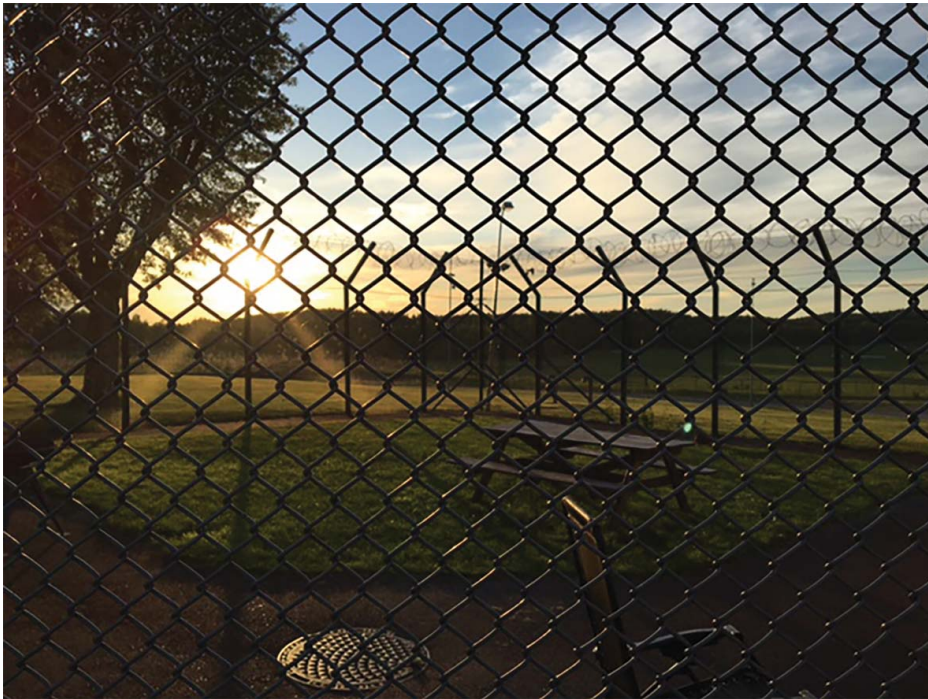


Figure 1. Photo of the surroundings, taken by one of the authors.

about the study on several occasions. For example, they were informed during a class, where some of the young men instantly volunteered to participate in the study, while some were initially critical but became intrigued and participated later.

Data collection was responsive to the opportunities and constraints of the broader environment. This resulted in an intermittent data collection process, using a mix of methods which was guided by the youths' condition i.e. restlessness, unexpected events and rigorous daily structure.

The majority of the interviews were undertaken in the young men's rooms by two researchers in each case. This meant an uneven distribution of power in relation to the young man, but was also recommended by the facility as a security precaution. When the researchers entered the room, they asked the young men for permission to sit down on the floor. Initially the researchers and the young men would start to talk about what it is like to live in the special youth home, a subject we found all the informants eager to talk about. The young men were invited to take photos of various aspects of their room, including objects that meant something to them, in a positive or negative matter. After the young men had taken the photos, the researchers started to focus the interview, using the photos as an aid for reflection. The sketching and talking was continuous and the researchers would provide space and time for each other when intertwining the two methods.



Figure 2. Photo of the surroundings, taken by one of the authors.

Data analysis

Collected data was analysed by applying a hermeneutical phenomenological method by Van Manen (1990). The structure of the lifeworld *existentials*, Lived space – Spatiality, Lived body – Corporality, Lived time – Temporality and Lived human relation – Relationality or intersubjectivity, was used to thematize the data. In this paper, we solely focus on the Lived space existential and plan to return to the other existentials in future writing.

In addition, Ahmed's theoretical perspective of 'Queer phenomenology; orientations, objects and others' (Ahmed 2006) was used as an interpretive framework to deepen the understanding of the lived experiences of the physical environment through the young men's perspective.

Ethics

The young men were invited to participate in the study through oral introduction by the researchers, as well as written information about the project stressing the young men's right to withdraw at any point, without giving any reason, and no consequences for their care. Informed consent was used.

In accordance with Gjengedal et al. (2013), we consider children/adolescents in incarceration a vulnerable group. Liamputtong (2007) states that researching vulnerable people's situation demands a sensible researcher and special research methodologies. The chosen methods align with the ethical guidelines of the Helsinki declaration (The World Medical Association 2013) as well as the ethical model by Beauchamp (2013); doing no harm, justice, autonomy and beneficence. The research project is approved by the committee of ethics (No: 1158–16).

Results

Our critical reading and analysis revealed three subthemes within the chosen over-arching theme: *Lived Space – Spatiality: Being elsewhere – Inherent meaning of objects and place, Being punished – By the physical environment and Being disempowered – Fighting for dignity.*

Being elsewhere – inherent meaning of objects and place

In our critical repeated readings of the data, meanings extracted from the young men's narratives were identified that explicitly communicated the young men's experiences of their physical environment. This theme is about how objects and place affect the young men in their everyday institutional life. Objects hold the meaning to empower and stay connected with their life outside the institution. To be 'elsewhere' is to be metaphysically outside the institution.

The sketch in Figure 3 contains a flag in one of the young men's rooms, a flag that he received from his mother which holds their mutual history and which has accompanied him through his institutional career. He says: 'It is the only thing that makes me feel at home' (IP 1).

Figure 4 is a photo taken by one of the participants. It displays the bars, which was one of the most important features of the physical environment to him. By this, he explicitly shows incarceration. He says: 'We are kids, we need freedom...// I want to go home' (IP 2). The photo in Figure 5 displays the physical barrier to the 'outside world', but also supports the idea of the place as a prison.

Being punished by the physical environment

This theme reveals the negative impact of poor interior design and how unintentional corporal punishment is inflicted to the body. The young men repeatedly expressed physical pain and discomfort. We interpret how the physical

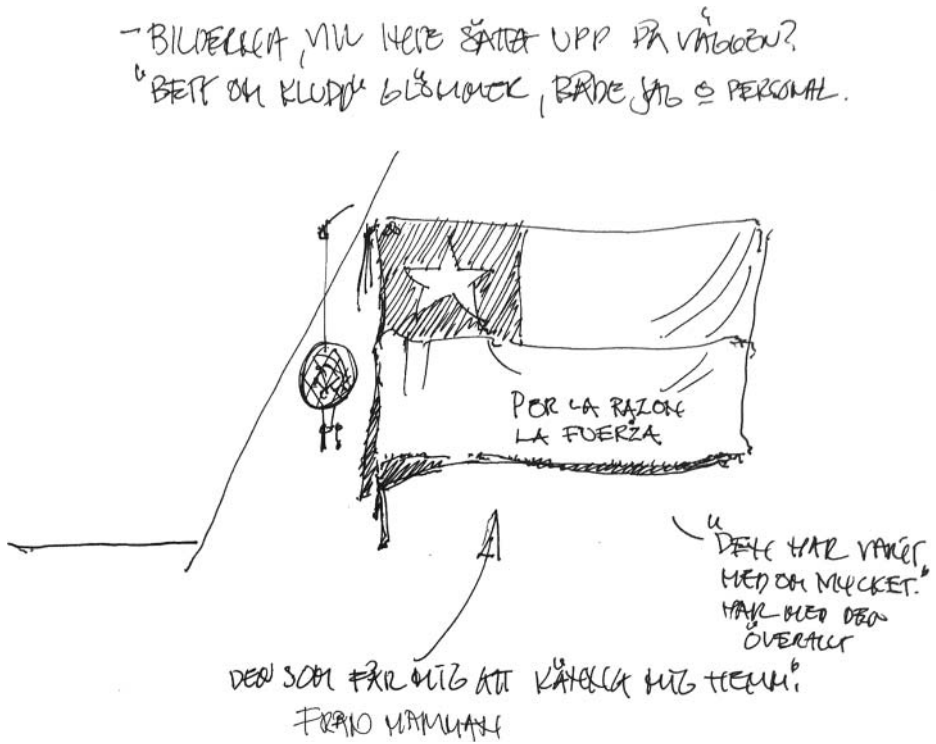


Figure 3. Sketch by one of the authors.



Figure 4. The polaroid photo is taken by one of the participants.



Figure 5. The polaroid photo is taken by one of the participants.

environment punishes the young men in two ways. First, it directly inflicts physical pain, as described by one of the participants when he says, 'I hit my head (metal bed lamp)' (IP 2). The placement and design of the lamp was apparently insufficient to his needs (Figure 6). Further, the majority of the young men were disturbed by the low technical quality of comfort that their beds offer. This is specifically related to the design of the mattress, as one young man expressed, 'It's nice NOT to have the fire-retardant mattress, (why?), good to wake up in the morning without back-pain or the whole body in pain' (IP 3).

Second, the physical environment hinders the young men from moving their bodies freely both literally and symbolically through its materiality. The barbed-wire fences, the locked windows, the window bars, the lockable steel doors, the wire fences, all these features have one purpose, to restrain their bodies (Figure 7). 'No normal room, windows that can't be opened and closed, we are incarcerated. Aren't we supposed to be able to breathe, see what I mean?' (IP 5).

Being disempowered – fighting for dignity

Being disempowered – fighting for dignity expresses the young men's lack of power and control of the physical environment as well as their struggle to gain respect by, and through, the physical environment. Torn wallpaper, scribbles on the wall, engraved messages and tags, the evidence of prior inhabitants imposes other bodies and life stories upon the present inhabitants, yet, the

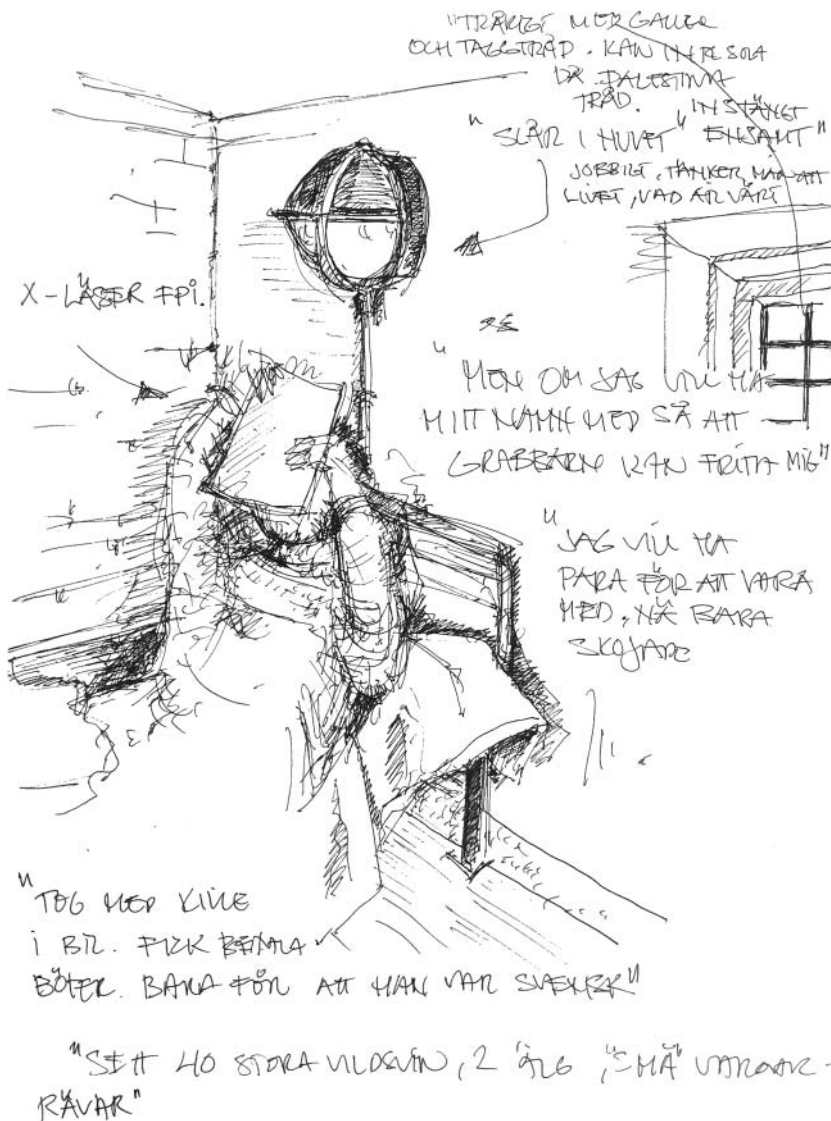


Figure 6. Sketch by one of the authors.

physical environment simultaneously becomes a vessel for shared narratives of loneliness, loss of power, desperation, sorrow and isolation 'I tag my name at every SiS-home' (IP 4) (Figure 8). The poor environment, expressed through simplified objects, hardly offering more than basic needs creates a passive and institutionalized state of mind and body, as one participant says, 'You play, you eat and you go out for a smoke' (IP 1).

We also observed the young men's struggle and effort to cover up and repair their immediate surroundings (Figure 9). However, they expressed that they were given little support to do this. Whether this was a reality or not, it was



Figure 7. The polaroid photo is taken by one of the participants.

obvious that their lack of energy hindered them in restoring their dignity through the physical environment.

Discussion

The chosen methods were appropriate for collecting data in the actual setting, however, a significant departure from the photo-voice method described by Wang and Burris (1997) was required due to the specific challenges of the context, time restraints, security and constant flux which meant that the method was more akin to the approach described as photo-elicitation than photo-voice. Collecting data in the special youth homes needed to be undertaken intermittently due to the young men's needs and difficulties to concentrate, mood swings and different types of incidences. This brought an altering of methods where the researchers did collaborate data collection (also due to security issues), which resulted in intertwining the methods and shadowing the young men, rather than observations. A positive effect was that shadowing also created stronger bonding to the participants, however, this was time consuming but also gave high quality data and insight into the young men's everyday life, brought to the researchers with a great dose of (black) humour (Figure 10).

Security requirements are numerous and can be difficult to meet in relation to data collection. Static security as fencing, windows and floor plans must not be displayed due to risk of breakout, nor may the young people's

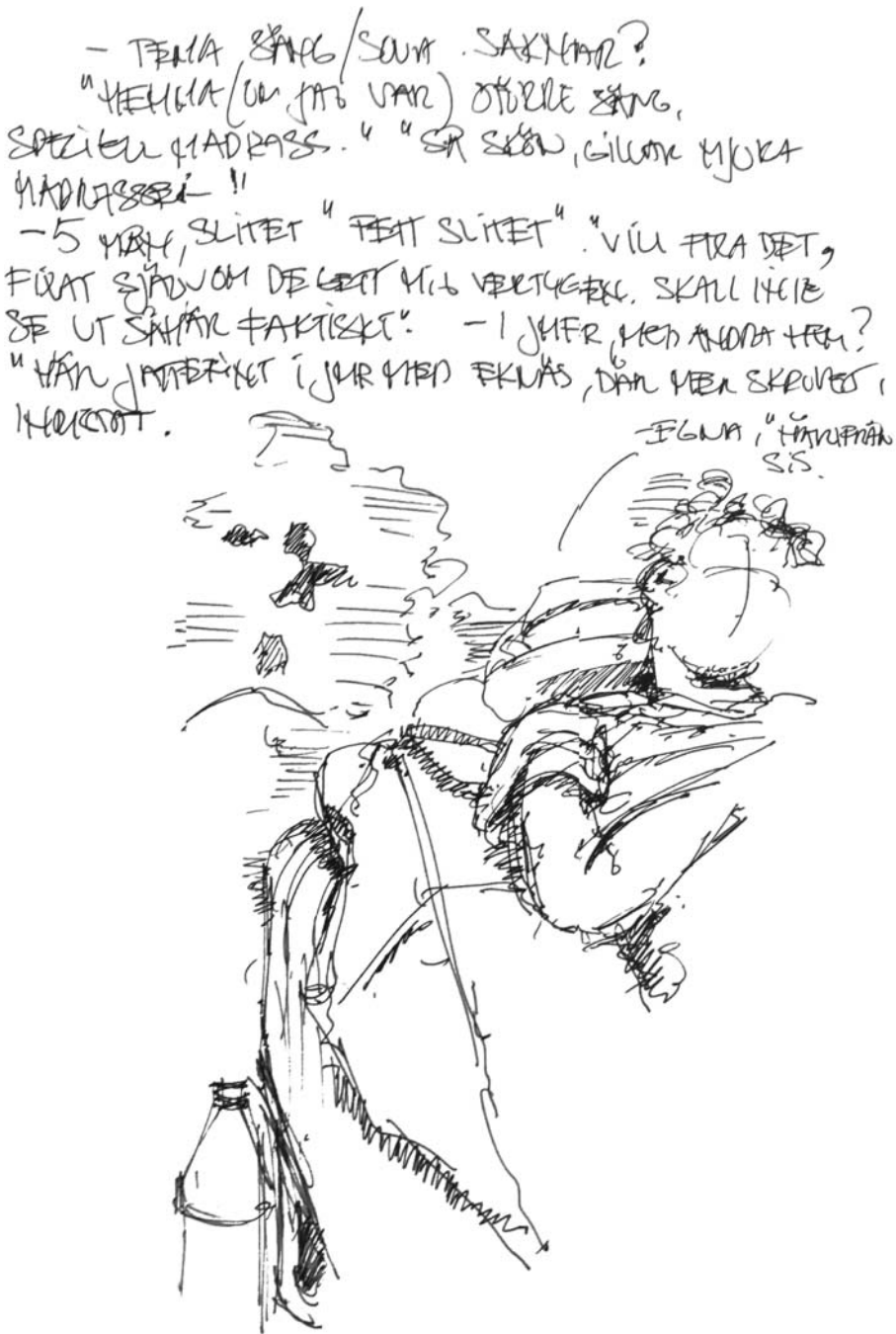


Figure 8. Sketch by one of the authors.



Figure 9. The polaroid photo is taken by one of the participants.

identities be revealed or the location of the institution in which they live; some are also there to be protected. The issue of identity is needless to point to as it is at the core of the ethical guidelines (Källström 2017), however, it is most important to understand the implications that neglect of security may cause, as well as how important it is to meet the authorities in this matter in order to be granted access. It was pointed out clearly that there was a risk that the researcher's documentation tools might be stolen, and mobiles with camera are rarely permitted, which speaks for the simple use of pen and paper or a polaroid camera.

We see several indications in relation to the future design of new special youth homes. What emerged most strongly in our findings is how prison-like design affected the young men, which in our view links to Ahmed's theory in the specific context of incarceration. Our interpretation is that a young person's directionality, when entering a special youth home, may either be confirmed or redirected with/through the physical environment. Feeling 'at home' in a prison-like setting may confirm an identity (or a direction) of criminality/drug abuse rather than point to possibilities of change and an alternate horizon without a self-destructive life. Following our findings, we propose that the design of the physical environment should rather direct towards design features from an everyday setting in the outside world.

Moreover, the methods worked well as a door opener due to their ability to intrigue the participants through the methods' visual, creative and inviting design (Figure 11). Despite the challenges, and some incidents, we find that

10.58

-VAR LÄRT DU SPILA?
 "MUSIKSKOLA 67:AN" KAN FÖRELLSE
 FUSKÄTT"
 "TRÄDE UT SPÖR."
 "JA"

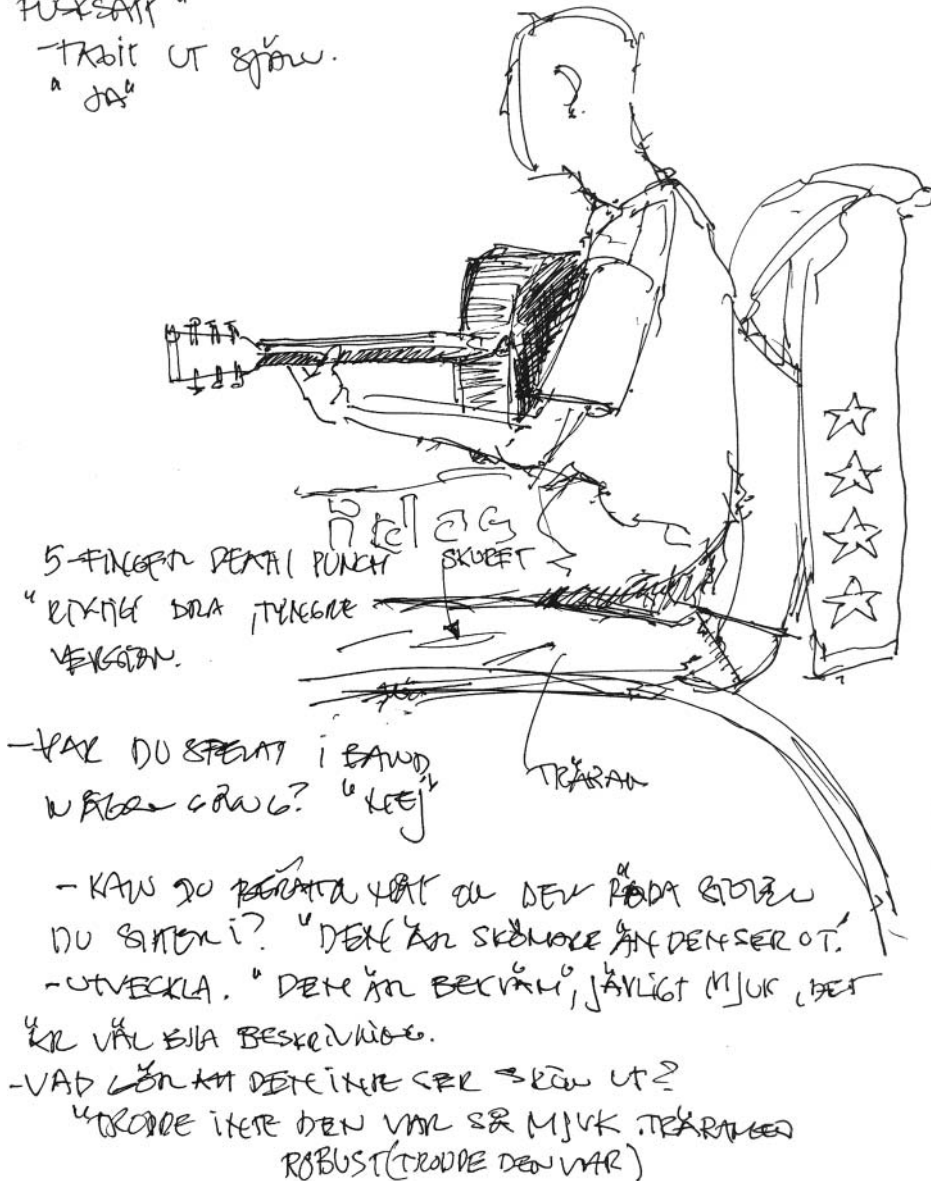


Figure 10. Bonding through music, a young man plays the guitar for one of the researchers.



Figure 11. Shadowing; accompanying the young men in/to school. Sketch by one of the authors.

there is a strong potential to further develop the applied methods to continued studies in these settings.

Acknowledgments

We are most grateful to the young men who generously shared their experiences and to the staff who facilitated for the researchers to collect data.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.


Notes on contributors

Franz James is a practicing interior product designer for secure care environments, researcher in a project relating to the physical environment in special residential homes for young people and PhD student in Design with the project 'Carceral design – Understanding the meaning and impact of objects, furniture and interior design in institutional spaces of incarceration and care.'

Sepideh Olausson is an associate professor in Critical Care at Sahlgrenska Academy. She is currently involved with a project examining patients' lived experiences of being cared for in forensic psychiatric settings with focus on patient rooms, and a researcher in a project relating to the physical environment in special residential homes for young people.

ORCID

Franz James  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7747-4325>

Sepideh Olausson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2246-731X>

References

- Ahmed, S. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Allen, Q. 2012. "Photographs and Stories: Ethics, Benefits and Dilemmas of Using Participant Photography with Black Middle-Class Male Youth." *Qualitative Research* 12: 443–458.
- Beauchamp, T. L. 2013. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cross, N. 2007. *Designerly Ways of Knowing*. Basel: Birkhäuser.
- Gjengedal, E., E. M. Ekra, H. Hol, M. Kjelsvik, E. Lykkeslet, R. Michaelsen, A. Orøy, et al. 2013. "Vulnerability in Health Care – Reflections on Encounters in Every Day Practice." *Nursing Philosophy: An International Journal for Healthcare Professionals* 14: 127.
- Goffman, E. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Hansen–Ketchum, P., and F. Myrick. 2008. "Photo Methods for Qualitative Research in Nursing: An Ontological and Epistemological Perspective." *Nursing Philosophy* 9: 205–213.
- Harper, D. 2012. *Visual Sociology*. London/New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Heidelberger, L., and C. Smith. 2016. "Low-Income, Urban Children's Perspectives on Physical Activity: A Photovoice Project." *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 20: 1124–1132.
- Husserl, E. 2001. *Logical Investigations*. Vol. 2. London: Routledge.
- Källström, Å. 2017. *Etiska reflektioner i forskning med barn*. Malmö: Gleerups.
- Liamputtong, P. 2007. *Researching the Vulnerable: A Guide to Sensitive Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Plunkett, R., B. D. Leipert, and S. L. Ray. 2013. "Unspoken Phenomena: Using the Photovoice Method to Enrich Phenomenological Inquiry." *Nursing Inquiry* 20: 156.
- Strack, R. W., C. Magill, and K. McDonagh. 2004. "Engaging Youth through Photovoice." *Health Promotion Practice* 5: 49–58.
- The World Medical Association. 2013. *WMA Declaration of Helsinki – Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects* [Online]. Available: <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/>
- Ulrich, R. S. 1984. "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery." *Science, New Series* 224: 420–421.
- Ulrich, R. S. 1991. "Effects of Interior Design on Wellness: Theory and Recent Scientific Research." *Journal of Health Care Design* 3: 97–109.
- Ulrich, R., X. Quan, C. Zimring, A. Joseph, and R. Choudhary. 2004. *The Role of the Physical Environment in the Hospital of the 21st Century: A Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity*. Report to The Center for Health Design for the Designing the 21st Century Hospital Project.
- Van Manen, M. 1990. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wang, C. C., and Y. A. Redwood-Jones. 2001. "Photovoice Ethics: Perspectives from Flint Photovoice." *Health Education & Behavior* 28: 560–572.
- Wang, C., and M. A. Burris. 1997. "Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment." *Health Education & Behavior* 24: 369–387.